

# **UW-CTRI News Release**

University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Senior Smokers Have New Reason to Quit**

It is never too late to quit smoking, and for seniors eligible for Medicare, getting help to quit just became a lot more affordable. Medicare now covers prescription medications to help certain smokers quit. This new benefit, launched in January, is in addition to the free counseling offered to smokers that began last year.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for certain Medicare beneficiaries to get the medication and counseling they need to quit," says Dr. Michael Fiore, director of the UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention. "Quitting smoking can improve people's lives even at age 65 or older."

The new Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit covers the following medications: Bupropion SR, nicotine inhaler, nicotine nasal spray and the prescription nicotine patch.

Tobacco treatment counseling services are also covered for qualifying outpatients and hospitalized beneficiaries as long as those services are provided by Medicare-recognized practitioners and physicians. Coverage includes two attempts per year, each with a maximum of one intermediate (3-10 minutes in length) or intensive (10 minutes or longer) sessions, with up to eight sessions per year. Group therapy will not be covered.

### **New Medicare Benefits**

#### **Covered Medications**

- \* **Bupropion** (Zyban or Wellbutrin)
- \* **Nicotine Patch** (via prescription only)
- \* **Nicotine Inhaler**
- \* **Nicotine Nasal Spray**

#### **Covered Counseling**

##### **Individual Counseling**

This includes two quit attempts per year and up to eight counseling sessions.

#### **Other Options**

##### **Call the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line**

Free telephone counseling is available by calling 1-877-270-(STOP) 7867.

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Coverage is limited to beneficiaries with a disease or adverse health effect that the U.S. Surgeon General has found to be linked to tobacco use, including heart disease, lung disease, cerebrovascular disease, blood clots, cataracts, weak bones and certain types of cancer. It also includes those patients taking a therapeutic agent whose metabolism or dosing is affected by tobacco use (based on FDA-approved information). For more information, please call 1-800-MEDICARE, or go online to [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

Quitting tobacco use has been shown to improve health and increase quality and length of life, particularly in older adults. About 10 percent of adults 65 and older use tobacco products.

Many tobacco users try quitting cold turkey, but only about five percent succeed. The good news is research shows that medication combined with counseling can quadruple smokers' chances. In the past, many low-income tobacco users have struggled to access these vital services.

Smoking is the number-one cause of preventable death in Wisconsin, killing more than 7,000 residents every year – more than AIDS, murders, suicides, drugs, alcohol and motor vehicle accidents combined. According to the American Cancer Society, smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer (about 80 percent of cases) and lung cancer is the leading cancer killer. Smoking is also a leading cause of death from heart disease and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

All Wisconsin residents who want to quit smoking or chewing tobacco can also call the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line for free telephone counseling, regardless of insurance coverage, at **1-877-270-STOP** (7867).

The Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, has provided cessation and prevention services in Wisconsin since 1992 and is a nationally recognized research center.

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